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Pakistan on list as US suspends immigrant visas

• 75 countries to be impacted, but full list not released yet • Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Haiti, Eritrea, Russia, Brazil, Cuba and Nigeria among nations affected • Move won't hinder tourist, business or other visas, such as for the upcoming FIFA World Cup • State Dept says clamping down on those who 'exploit the generosity of the American people' • Pakistani missions in US expected to offer guidance in coming days

By Anwar Iqbal

WASHINGTON: The US State Department announced on Wednesday that it will suspend immigrant visa processing for Pakistan and 74 other countries, amid concerns that immigrants from these nations often rely on public welfare programmes, or fail security vetting.

"The State Department will use its long-standing authority to deem ineligible potential immigrants who would become a public charge on the United States and exploit the generosity of the American people," State Department spokesperson Tommy Piggott told various media outlets.

"The Trump administration is bringing an end to the abuse of America's immigration system by those who would extract wealth from the American people," he added.

The freeze will begin on January 21, with no set time for it to end.

According to *AFP*, the latest move does not affect tourist, business or other visas, including for soccer fans seeking to visit for this year's World Cup, although the Trump administration has vowed to vet all applicants' social media histories.

The Pakistan Embassy in Washington said they were still awaiting official intimation from the US authorities regarding the freeze and its implementation. The embassy indicated that it would provide guidance to Pakistani nationals once formal instructions are received.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt posted on X that the countries affected would include Somalia — whose citizens Trump has attacked in heated terms after immigrants were involved in a funding scandal in Minnesota — as well as Russia and Iran.

Not a blanket ban

Officials, however, emphasised that the freeze is not a blanket ban, but a targeted enforcement measure aligned with the SMART Act (H.R. 3466), which prioritises merit-based immigration over unvetted entries. The policy specifically targets countries that fail to cooperate on security screening and document verification.

"This pause ensures that new immigrants are thoroughly vetted and are less likely to extract wealth from American taxpayers," a spokesperson said.

"We are working to protect the generosity of the American people while maintaining a fair, merit-based immigration system," he added.

Countries affected

The freeze affects nations across Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Haiti, Eritrea, Brazil, Cuba, Russia and Nigeria, among others.

The State Department did not immediately release a full list of countries.

All categories of immigrant visas —

Continued on Page 11

PM Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir look on as Zachary Witkoff, CEO of Trump family-owned World Liberty Financial, and Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb sign an MoU regarding digital payment architectures for cross-border transactions.—APP Report on Page 9

Several nations eying JF-17 jets, says PM

• Reveals country is 'actively engaged' in talks for jets' sale; minister says China 'is on board' • PM Shehbaz maintains Karachi-Chaman road to be completed in a year; seven Daanish schools to be built in Balochistan by year-end • Seeks reform recommendations to improve civil services

By Syed Irfan Raza

ISLAMABAD: As a number of nations show interest in buying JF-17 Thunder jets from Pakistan, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday confirmed that several countries were in active talks with Islamabad to procure the fighter aircraft, which became a centre of attention following the India-Pakistan conflict in May last year.

Addressing the federal cabinet meeting in the capital, PM Shehbaz recalled Pakistan's victory in a war last year, an apparent reference to the four-day military conflict with India, and said the demand for Pakistan's fighter jets had increased since then. The premier said there were several states "actively engaged" in talks with Pakistan — a move that would boost the country's economy and its defence production.

Indonesia, Bangladesh, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia have expressed interest in buying the fighter jets, while Azerbaijan inducted this aircraft into its air force in 2024. Azerbaijan had become the third country to acquire JF-17 fighters after Myanmar and Nigeria.

Battle-tested

As JF-17 attracts more buyers

Continued on Page 5

Aurangzeb urges MNCs to update business models

Dawn Report

ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb on Wednesday acknowledged that some multinational companies (MNCs) had left Pakistan due to "high taxes and energy costs" but urged them to revise business models in line with a changing global economy.

Addressing the Pakistan Policy Dialogue hosted by the Policy Research & Advisory Council (PRAC) in Islamabad, he said: "There are firms that are leaving Pakistan, which is true, and we must acknowledge if the taxation is high, energy cost is high or financing cost — those have been real issues."

However, he added: "It takes two to tango... if you are wedged into your business models from the last 50 years, it is not going to work in the modern world."

Over the past few years, multiple MNCs have shut down their operations in Pakistan, including Procter & Gamble, Eli Lilly, Shell, Microsoft, Uber and Yamaha.

Citing Nestle and Unilever as examples of MNCs successfully operating in Pakistan, Mr Aurangzeb said, "If Nestle and Unilever can do local sourcing, which keeps their margins high, they are now able to export, which is why they continue operating here."

He also claimed that "20 new foreign investors" had entered Pakistan in

Continued on Page 5

Opposition demands joint sitting on Iran situation

By Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD: The opposition alliance comprising the PTI and other parties has demanded a joint session of parliament to discuss the tensions in the Middle East, particularly Iran, besides urging the government to convene a meeting of "neighbouring countries" to formulate a "joint and coordinated strategy".

The Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP) held a meeting in the federal capital under the chairmanship of Mahmood Khan Achakzai, wherein the participants expressed concerns over the deteriorating regional situation. The participants urged the government to call an urgent joint session of parliament to form a national policy through collective wisdom.

They claimed that the international order was changing: the Israeli aggression in Palestine and the conduct of the United States in Latin America have severely undermined international law.

They observed that imperial and colonial powers were tightening their grip around Pakistan's

Continued on Page 5

ON OTHER PAGES

Signs point to 'imminent' US attack on Iran

Tensions flared across the Middle East on Wednesday as US started withdrawing personnel from crucial bases in the region while Iran warned that it would retaliate against American bases if Washington initiated an attack. "All the signals are that a US attack is imminent, but that is also how this administration behaves to keep everyone on their toes," a Western military official said. **Page 12**

Punjab govt will buy only electric or hybrid cars

• 'Bans' purchase of petrol, diesel vehicles to 'cut emissions' • Approval for new fuel pumps linked to installation of EV charging units • S&GAD yet to notify policy • Minister says move part of 'smog mitigation measures'

By Mansoor Malik and Zulqernain Tahir

LAHORE: The Punjab government on Wednesday announced a complete ban on the purchase of petrol and diesel vehicles across its departments, allowing only electric or hybrid modes of transportation in a move aimed at cutting emissions and accelerating the transition to clean transport.

The announcement was made by Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman in a statement issued here. However, it added that vehicles deployed for field duties had been exempted from the restriction.

Mr Zaman noted that a comprehensive electric vehicle (EV) policy for the province was expected to be announced shortly. He said the policy would reflect the provincial government's commitment to environmental protection and the promotion of green energy.

New petrol pumps

As part of the same initiative, the approval of no-objection certificates (NOCs) for new petrol pumps has been made conditional on the installation of electric vehicle charging units.

"No new petrol pump will be allowed to operate without EV charging facilities," the chief secretary stated.

The statement added that NOCs had already been issued through the e-Biz Portal for 170 new petrol pumps across 31 cities in Punjab, all of which are required to install EV charging units.

These include 29 petrol pumps in Faisalabad, 14 in Lahore, 10 in Bahawalpur, nine each in Khanewal and Bahawalnagar, eight each in Rawalpindi and Jhang, and seven each in Toba Tek Singh, Mianwali, Kasur, and Chiniot.

However, the chief secretary did not respond to a question on whether the policy decision banning the purchase of petrol and diesel vehicles was taken at any formal forum or was merely a statement.

S&GAD yet to notify move

It is learnt that no notification regarding the policy change banning the procurement of petrol and diesel vehicles and promoting the procurement of electric and hybrid vehicles has been issued by the Services and General Administration Department (S&GAD).

When contacted, an S&GAD Transport Wing official told *Dawn* that the department had neither received any formal approval for the change in policy nor issued any notification in this regard.

Answering a question, the official said discussions on shifting to electric and hybrid vehicles had been underway in the department for quite some time, in line with environmental and climate change initiatives.

The official added that the policy would take effect once formal approval is granted by the chief minister following the required process. The

Continued on Page 11